

Yayın Değerlendirme / Book Reviews

Andrew F. Cooper. *The BRICS*. Oxford University Press, 2016.*

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The global order has been witnessing many ambiguities and challenges in the recent years. Francis Fukuyama's foresight did not come true and history did not come to an end with the end of the Cold War. The conflicts and civil wars have been continuing in different parts of the world. The democracies have been declining as the authoritarian tendencies rise in many parts of the world. In addition, the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has created a new challenge in the global order that is still to be overcome.

In these turbulent global conditions, the power shift in the world order has become a reality of life as the economic gravity of the world has been shifting from the West to the East. As the economic power of the so-called rising powers has been increasing in the global system, the economies of the Western states have been declining.

In this *Zeitgeist*, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries have become important actors in the global system. They have started to play a bigger role in the global economy, at the same time, they

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tried to increase their voices in the global political system as well. The book written by Andrew Cooper analyses the conceptualisation, foundation and evolution of the BRICS in a very concise way. The book first traces the origins of the term of the BRICS, then sheds light on its historical development. It also examines the institutions of the BRICS and evaluates its prospects for the future.

The author of the book, Prof. Andrew F. Cooper is working as a professor at the Department of Political Science and Basile School of International Affairs of the University of Waterloo. At the same time he is also fellow at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research in Germany and fellow at the United Nations University, Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies. The author specialises in rising powers and has also written *The Group of Twenty* (G20) published by the Routledge in 2013.

BRIC as a concept started its life as a concept developed in 2001 by Jim O'Neill, an economist working at Goldman Sachs that is a global investment banking, securities and investment management firm headquartered in New York. By this concept O'Neill wanted to refer to increasing economic power and rising investment opportunities of the BRIC countries. It is important to note that the acronym BRIC was first developed by a specialist, not by decision-makers, politicians or academics. When new international organisations are established, usually it is the decision-makers and founders who name those organisations. But in the case of the BRIC, it was named by a professional, not by a politician.

The shift in the global order has been manifesting itself by the end of the 20th century when the Asian economic crisis erupted in the late 1990's. The ever increasing share of the emerging economies in the global economy led to the emergence of Group of 20 (G20) when the leaders of the developed states in the G8 understood that there was a need to cooperate with the rising powers in order to govern the international economy. The creation of the G20 could be understood as an indication of the recognition of rising powers.

In the early 2000's some of the Western leaders started to look for different ways as to how to accommodate the rising economic powers. The then French President Jacques Chirac was one of them. He stated that G-8

was not inclusive enough any more in 2003 and invited leaders of some countries, including Brazil and India to the Evian Summit in France.

It was another big step forward when the G8 countries invited the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (at the time named as Outreach Five) to their summit in Gleneagles in Scotland in the UK in 2005. Their negotiation on the climate change with the leaders of the BRICS countries was an important indication about the necessity of cooperation among the developed and developing states.¹ Cooper's book examines the origins and historical process of the BRICS in a comprehensive way. He states that the inclusion of BRICS countries in the G8 summit had symbolic importance and played a role in the creation of the BRICS. (p. 8)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was another Western leader who also tried to accommodate the rising powers in the global governance. She sent an invitation to the leaders of Outreach Five countries to attend the Heiligendamm Process in 2007 within the framework of G8 summit.

Cooper analyses all the steps of the foundation process. He underlines the importance of the 2008 global financial crisis that encouraged the leaders of these emerging powers to come together and try to play a bigger role in the global governance. The summit in Toyako, Japan in 2008 by the BRIC leaders was the unofficial, but historical summit. The official summit in Yekaterinburg in Russia in 2009 marked the official foundation of the BRIC and hence the concrete sign of the transformation of the global order from unipolarity to multipolarity. In author's own phrasing it "signals the emergence of a more diverse international system animated by powers outside the traditional Western establishment." (p. 13) With the launching of the BRIC an important discussion was started by the International Relations scholars and practitioners whether the international system has been shifting to multilateralism after the unilateral turn that started following the end of the bipolar international system. One year later, South Africa joined it and then BRIC became BRICS.

The book underlines the fact that while the share of US and European economies in the global income has been declining, the share of emerging economies has been rising. The institutionalisation of BRICS is an indication that some of these countries want to play a bigger role in global governance

in accordance with their rising economic status. In that regard, Cooper states the following:

Not only was the legitimacy deficit highly visible, due to the asymmetry between the position of the traditional Western rule makers and the non-Western rule takers, but the capacity for efficient institutional performance through a more inclusive approach was apparent. In order for the global system to work, the BRICS needed to be accorded a greater pride of place. (37)

His emphasis on the legitimacy issue must be noted. For the global system to maintain its legitimacy there was a need to listen to the voices of rising powers. The emergence of BRICS must be evaluated from the perspective of the legitimacy of the international system as well.

The author also states that BRICS presents a historical departure because great powers in the global system have emerged as a result of great wars in the historical process. For example, Prussia emerged as a great power following 1814-1815 coalition wars against France, the US as a result of World War I and the USSR as a result of the World War II. However, in the case of BRICS we witness a peaceful rise of emerging powers. That difference must be emphasised. BRICS countries peacefully underlined the fact that they do not want to be considered as “rule-takers” any more.

Another important feature of this new group of states is that they are not anti-Western. BRICS countries do not want to change the international system established after the end of the Second World War, however, they just want to play a greater role in that system.

The global system has witnessed previous attempts by developing countries to raise their voices during the Cold War as well. The G77 initiative and the call for the New International Economic Order were important milestones in that respect. At that time, their agenda was based on economic inequalities in the global economic governance and poor economic conditions in some of the states. However, the priorities of BRICS countries are different and they have a different agenda. BRICS do not favor a third world approach. As representing a relatively richer group of emerging states they want to have a better representation in international financial institutions and want to be taken into consideration in global governance.

BRICS countries have similarities as well as differences. Member states want to underline common points, but try to minimise problems among themselves. With regard to similarities one should note their emphasis on the principles of Westphalian system. They all stress the importance of state sovereignty and are against external intervention. Considering the increasing use of humanitarian intervention and emergence of the principle of responsibility to protect, these countries do have some concerns, especially non-democratic BRICS countries, namely China and Russia.

However, despite their joint call for amendments in the international system and common emphasis on the Westphalian principles, there are also diverging points as well. BRICS represents a loose grouping and some of the member states do have some problems with each other and some of them have different policies towards certain issues. Although examples are many, one can, for instance, note the border dispute between China and India that has recently sparked violent skirmishes on the border area. Another example is related to trade issue. Although South Africa and Brazil aim to make the international trade more liberal, India supports protectionism. Hence, they have diverging national interests in different issues, however, these differences do not prevent their cooperation in other realms.

BRICS did achieve to establish new institutions after its foundation. With the proposal of India BRICS countries established the New Development Bank in 2014 to support the economic development in member states. In the same year they also founded the Contingent Reserve Arrangement to help the countries during an economic crisis in the future.

Meanwhile, the author reminds that the BRICS is a state-centred organisation. The increasing cooperation between BRICS states does not mean that their societal ties are getting better. Since two member states, namely Russia and China, are non-democratic countries, there is no hope for expecting that societies of those countries would become the engines of the increasing relationship. Many of the leading political cadre of the member states are already suspicious towards their own societies. Therefore, in the foreseeable future, we can not expect that societies or NGO's of BRICS states would become dynamic agencies of the institutionalisation process.

Despite its state-centricism, there is a trend towards including the business community in the process. The BRICS Business Council was founded in 2013 and businesspeople from the member states participated in the forum. In addition, BRICS Trade Union Forum was also established by the representatives of the trade unions from the five countries. In addition Women's Forum of the BRICS Countries as well as Civic BRICS were also founded in order to increase the ties. However, all these efforts were under the control of the states. Just to give an example, participants of the BRICS Business Council were chosen by the decision makers. That alone shows how political agency tries to determine the interactions among different actors as well.

Andrew Cooper's book is one of the most concise academic publications on the issue of BRICS. It analyses its historical background, evolution, and institutionalisation. It underlines the fact it is not an anti-Western, anti-systemic organisation, on the contrary, the member states accept the main principles of the current neoliberal order, however, they want their interests taken into account. It is recommended for scholars, students as well as general public interested in the shifting global order. The biggest deficiency of the book is its lack of a theoretical framework. A conceptual/theoretical examination of the emerging powers would have provided a more comprehensive analysis.

The discussion on BRICS in the academic literature will continue in the foreseeable future. An important issue to be examined in the upcoming years will be the potential political and economic impact of Covid-19 on these emerging powers and their role in the global system.

Notes

- 1 See also Nicholas Bayne, "Overcoming Evil with Good: Impressions of the Gleneagles Summit, 6-8 July 2005", <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/evaluations/2005gleneagles/bayne2005-0718.html>